

Questions and Answers about Local Historic Districts in Marietta

Introduction

Many cities with historic areas recognize the value that those neighborhoods bring to the city: desirable places to live, fine examples of architecture, and attraction of tourists and businesses. Marietta has five neighborhoods listed in the national Register of Historic Places. Marietta has also enacted a local Historic Preservation Ordinance. One local historic district, along a portion of Kennesaw Avenue, has been designated. Historic districts have been shown in studies to have higher property values and property values that are more stable in “down markets.” The processes involved serve to protect the property values of all homeowners in a historic district.

1. What is a local historic district?

It is a specific geographic area that has a significant number of historic properties. It is designated by the City Council under Marietta’s local Historic Preservation Ordinance. (See Article 7-8-9 of the City Code at www.mariettaga.gov.) A historic district must have approval of at least 60 percent of the property owners in the district. It protects the historic character of the district by requiring any significant exterior changes visible from the street to be approved by the local Historic Preservation Commission (HPC).

2. How is this different from a National Register historic district?

A National Register Historic District identifies an area with historic structures, but its designation carries no power to preserve the structures in the district. A local district preserves the historic character through the design review process.

3. How is a local district designated?

Marietta’s historic preservation ordinance specifies a multi-step process. A summary:

- The HPC identifies a location that has historic houses.
- An information meeting is held to gauge homeowner interest.
- Specific design guidelines are drafted and distributed
- Public hearings are held at various stages of the process.
- A specific geographic area is proposed as a historic district, and city staff conducts a vote to see if 60% approval is obtained.
- The City Council approves (or changes) the designation of the district.
- Two homeowners from the district are elected to join the HPC for local decisions.

4. What is the makeup of the HPC?

Each of the 7 members of the City Council appoints a member of the HPC. When a local historic district is designated, the district homeowners elect two additional members to participate in design reviews for properties in that particular district.

5. What types of changes need advance review by the HPC?

Any material change to the exterior that is visible from the street or sidewalk, with examples and exceptions listed in the design guidelines.

6. Are exterior paint colors subject to review and approval?

No, paint colors are specifically excluded from the review process.

7. Are interior changes subject to review and approval?

No.

8. Is routine maintenance subject to design review?

No

9. What are some examples of changes subject to review?

Addition of a room, a second story, a porch, a fence, or a wall, if visible from the street, would require a review by the HPC.

10. Why is the review and approval necessary?

The review is not to prevent homeowners from making changes to their property. The process is designed to preserve the historic character of the district by having changes be consistent with the historic character.

11. How does the review process work?

At the time of the building permit process, the city staff will determine if HPC review is needed. If it is, the homeowner presents the plan to the HPC for review and approval. The HPC may approve or recommend changes to the design to better maintain the historic character of the district. When a “certificate of appropriateness” is granted and the building permit issued, construction may begin. The HPC should not be viewed as an adversary but as a consultant striving to preserve the value of the historic district.

12. Do the plans need to be drawn by an architect?

No, but all drawings of proposed work need to be clear and accurate.

13. Is there a fee to have the HPC review a design?

No, there is no fee for the HPC review.

14. What if the homeowner disagrees with the HPC’s decision about a change?

The city ordinance enables a homeowner to appeal to the City Council, whose decision is binding.

15. Would a historic district designation prevent a property owner from demolishing a structure?

Historic designation would make a plan to demolish subject to review, and other city rules might come into play. Designation would make any new structure subject to review for consistency with the character of the district.



*Alan Levine
David Freedman
Marion Savic
Ray Worden
Renee Severson
Rebecca Nash Paden
Martin Kendall*

16. Doesn't the design review process limit the rights of a property owner to make changes to their property?

It does serve as a limitation for certain types of changes within a historic district, where the overall value of the historic character has been identified as worthy of preservation.

17. What is the penalty for "violation" of a historic district review process?

The historic preservation process works in concert with the building permit process. A property owner who disregards the review and approval process is subject to the city's building permit and code rules. In an extreme case, unapproved modifications could be required to be altered, removed, or torn down.

18. Does historic district designation affect the use of properties in the district?

No, usage is governed by zoning rules.

19. Does being in a historic district restrict an owner's ability to sell a property?

There are no restrictions on the sale of a property. Future owners will be notified of the location in a historic district, and the rules apply to future owners.

20. Is an owner required to make changes to existing construction as a result of creation of a historic district?

No, only future changes are covered.